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NATIONALIST CHINA: Taipei's international setbacks are arousing hopes among both Mainlanders and Taiwanese for significant alteration of the government that the Nationalist leaders are unprepared to meet.

Students, the press, and some cabinet-level officials have advocated various reforms for months, and recent public suggestions for less wide-ranging "rejuvenation" of the establishment by important government figures have reinforced popular feeling. At the same time some Nationalist officials, particularly those who might be classed as technocrats, have been arguing--cautiously and vaguely--for a clear expression of Taiwan's "separate identity." The changes planned by the government, however, are merely gestures toward the Taiwanese majority and will not curtail Mainlander power.

Some native Taiwanese also appear to be taking political soundings. In early December associates of a Taiwanese politician passed the US Embassy a document calling for a greater Taiwanese role in a reorganized government, a reduction in the armed forces, and "political neutrality." This incident appears to have been a crude attempt to involve US officials in a campaign favoring "Taiwanese aspirations." Those who passed the document claimed that it had the support of Vice Premier Chiang Ching-kuo, the generalissimo's political heir, but this almost certainly was an attempt to make the document more respectable; as far as can be determined, the vice premier does not advocate many of its proposals.

The technocrats' proposition and the Taiwanese document are essentially trial balloons aimed at identifying others on Taiwan willing to press for significant change--and above all in the hope of eliciting positive comment from US officials. But it is already clear that Taipei's planned "rejuvenation"--designed to forestall domestic criticism--is in fact raising the expectations of the politically aware to a point where they would complicate the process of adjustment to "post-UN" realities.

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THAILAND: There has been considerable jockeying for position within the military establishment since the take-over of all government functions three weeks ago.

Much of the infighting centers on the mechanics of running the government under a new military-dominated superstructure. Factional elements are striving to staff the new organizations, including the revolutionary party headquarters, with loyal officers and to crowd out the staffs of rivals. The habitual indecisiveness of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, chairman of the revolutionary government, has contributed to even greater confusion and contention than is normal in the second echelon.

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The uncertainties of the immediate post-coup period have also caused some problems between Thanom and his deputy Praphat. Praphat, who expects to succeed Thanom once he steps down, reportedly is exasperated over Thanom's apparent intention to remain at the helm indefinitely. Because of close ties between them, however, Praphat is loath to press the question. Mutual interest in preserving their place at the top will in any event prompt both Praphat and Thanom to keep their differences in check and their subordinates in line.

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